BRIGADIER GENERAL IENRY JACKSON HUNT

Hunt was too stuffy and conserva- stiff and "Old Army" to ever be with his men, but his prompt deci- :ction of the artillery arm of the the Potomac had already been cru- several battles in the two years ettysburg.

/as the great artillery general of the r. He had a genius for organization, keen knowledge of the science of drew admiration from his Confed- s—even though they were the vic- Hunt's belief in densely supplied gunfire from massed batteries. He rly liked to focus every available ne Confederate battery at a time, ng the target with a hail of iron ioving on to the next enemy gun Hunt did not advocate indiscrimi- non fire, and he sternly preached . gun crew should take the time to sight and aim its piece before every n in the hottest action, he consid- ered a gun firing at a rate quicker than one round every two minutes to be firing wildly and wasting ammunition. (One story has Hunt castigating one of his artillery officers when he appealed for more ammunition in the midst of a battle. "Young man," Hunt scolded, "are you aware that every round you fire costs $2.67?") He even associated the quick expenditure of ordnance with cowardice, for he thought that any crew which rapidly discharged its ammunition did so because it was anxious to hitch up the guns and head rearward. To combat this, he forbade any battery to retire just because the chests were empty; batteries were required to send the caissons back for resupply and then sit under fire—every man at his post—while they waited for it to return.

Hunt was born into a military family stationed at the frontier outpost of Detroit in 1819. As an eight-year old boy, he accompanied his infantry officer father on the expedition that established Fort Leavenworth. Orphaned at age ten, he graduated from West Point at twenty and chose the artillery arm of the service. He earned fame for his bravery a few years later in the Mexican War, when he ran his fieldpiece right up to an enemy cannon and destroyed it in a muzzle-to-muzzle duel. By 1856, he was already one of the most distinguished authorities on the gunner's art in the Regular Army, chosen as a member of a three-man board to review light artillery tactics. The report of the board was adopted in 1860 and composed into a manual that served as the "bible" for artillerymen on both sides in the Civil War.

After the Civil War began, Hunt made himself conspicuous in his first battle, heroically covering the retreat of the Union army from an exposed position with his four-gun battery at Bull Run. By the time of the Peninsula Campaign the next spring, he was already the Army of the Potomac's top gunner, in command of its Artillery

Reserve. At Malvern Hill, the last action of the Seven Days' Battles, he directed his massed and well-sited guns so well that one admirer was reminded of "an organist pulling the stops." Hunt's fieldpieces caused such slaughter amongst the Rebel attackers that the battle was won with only the moderate participation of the Federal infantry.

Hunt was promoted to brigadier general in September 1862, and made Chief of Artillery by Maj. Gen. George McClellan in the middle of the Maryland Campaign. An immediate indication of Hunt's value to the Union army was the nickname the Confederate veterans gave to the September 17 Battle of Antietam: "Artillery Hell."

At Fredericksburg in December, Hunt spent a week or more posting 140 guns in a line on Stafford Heights, a ridge on the Union side of the Rappahannock River. It was Hunt's intimidating array which deterred General Robert E. Lee from counterattacking the decimated and otherwise vulnerable Federal infantry formations as they staggered away from their disastrous assault against Marye's Heights.

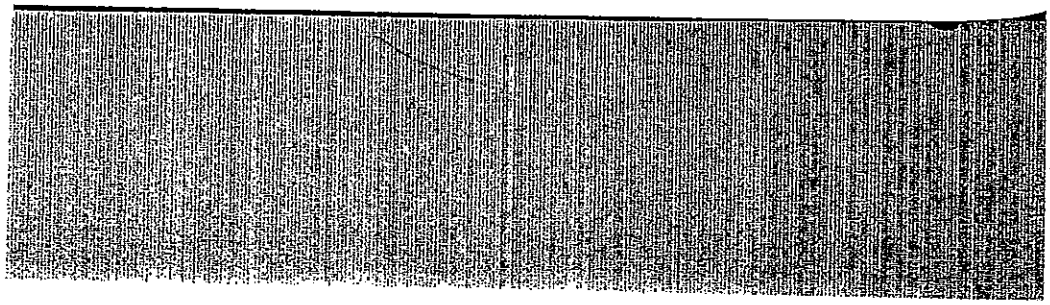
The army's next commander, Maj. Gen. Joe Hooker, had an unfortunate antipathy toward Hunt and stripped him of his command, leaving him with only administrative duties. This cost the Federal army dearly at the Battle of Chancellorsville in May 1863, where the traditional advantages in the quality and volume of fire of the Union batteries were squandered through mismanagement. Hooker (and many other Union officers) recognized this problem, and he belatedly restored Hunt to his active battlefield role on the third day of the battle, though the move came too late to change the outcome.

As the Army of the Potomac headed toward Pennsylvania in the early summer of 1863, Hunt's value to the army was freshly vindicated and universally acknowledged. When Maj. Gen. George Meade took command three days before Gettysburg, the army had a new chief who, like Hunt, was thoroughly professional and rather stiff. Although the two generals were not close personal associates, they enjoyed mutual respect for one another, and Hunt considered Meade a "gentleman." Meade, in turn, often sought Hunt's opinion and implicitly trusted his judgment, frequently using him as his surrogate on the battlefield.

GETTYSBURG: On July 1, after spending the entire first day of the battle in the rear at army headquarters in Taneytown, Hunt received an order from Meade sometime after 7:00 p.m. to move the Artillery Reserve to Gettysburg—an act which effectively committed the Army of the Potomac to do battle there. Hunt rode to Gettysburg with Meade's small party of seven that night, leaving around 10:00 a.m. and arriving on Cemetery Hill at 11:30 a.m.

At about 2:00 in the early morning of July 2, Hunt and Meade rode south along the army's line in the moonlight from Cemetery Ridge to near Little Round Top, then to the army's right, where the Baltimore Pike crossed Rock Creek. Having scouted the excellent defensive ground upon which his army was deployed, Meade instructed Hunt to continue to study the terrain and supervise the placement of the army's artillery. By 10:30 that morning, the efficient Hunt had 108 cannon from the Artillery Reserve on hand, as well as a surplus stock of ammunition from which all the army's batteries would gratefully borrow in the days ahead.

It was a little after 10:00 a.m. when Hunt returned to army headquarters from Culp's Hill and became involved in the dispute between Meade and Third Corps' leader Maj. Gen. Daniel Sickles. Sickles was worried about his corps' position on the army's left, an issue that became one of the great controversies of the battle. Meade declined to go over the ground with Sickles personally, and he sent Hunt instead. Sickles pointed out to Hunt the advanced position he wanted to take, on the high ground along the Emmitsburg Road about three-quarters of a mile in front of his assigned position. When Sickles asked if he should advance to the new line, Hunt shook his head: "Not on my authority." At that point, a cannonade opened on Cemetery Hill, and Hunt rode off to give his attention



to the gunfire, making a point to go by headquarters and tell Meade of the line Sickles proposed. Later, after Sickles had advanced his line without permission, Hunt rode back to the Third Corps and helped ready its artillery for the impending Southern assailment. When the Confederate attack commenced, Hunt galloped to Devil's Den, the endpoint of Sickle's line, to observe the posting of one of his batteries. Hunt dismounted to confer with the artillery officer there, and as he made his way back to his horse, was nearly trampled in a bizarre stampede of terror-stricken cattle. He remained to direct his guns in the desperate fighting on Sickles' sector for the rest of the afternoon.

That night, Hunt worked with Brig. Gen. Robert Tyler of the Artillery Reserve to ensure that damaged equipment was repaired, ammunition chests were refilled, decimated batteries were reorganized, and that the available serviceable guns were readied for service by the next morning. At dawn on July 3, when the Twelfth Corps batteries opened the battle on Culp's Hill, Hunt was there to help direct their fire. When the fighting eased at that point in late morning, he went to inspect the field pieces on Cemetery Hill, and observed the Confederate artillery buildup on the ridge to the west. Hunt allowed the enemy to continue their emplacements during an informal "artillery truce."

At 1:00 p.m., when Hunt was on Little Round Top resting from his morning's inspection, the 150-gun Confederate cannonade commenced. The guns were aimed at the Union defenders on Cemetery Ridge, the focal point for "Pickett's Charge" scheduled to begin later in the afternoon. Hunt rode back to the Artillery Reserve to see about fresh batteries and ammunition, then trotted to Cemetery Ridge. While the shells hissed and exploded amongst his batteries, Hunt moved up and down the line, checking the condition of his guns and crews and making sure they fired slowly and deliberately. After an hour or so, in spite of his efforts at conservation, ammunition began to run low. It occurred to Hunt that if the Union batteries ceased firing, the Rebels might be fooled into thinking their bombardment had effectively reduced the capability of the Federal cannoneers, so he rode along the ridge ordering his guns to go silent. About 3:00 p.m., the Confederate batteries stopped firing and the mile-long line of Pickett's Charge appeared. Hunt's batteries still had long-range ammunition in their chests, and they began to mercilessly punish their attackers' flanks. (In the middle of the Union line, the gunners were out of shot and shell where Maj. Gen. Winfield Hancock had ordered the guns at this location to keep blasting away during the cannonade to inspire the infantry.) At the climax of the attack, as the Southerners clambered over the wall and closed in on one of his batteries, Hunt appeared among the guns on horseback, firing his revolver into the Rebels until his horse was shot, and he fell pinned beneath his dead mount. Pulled free, he mounted his sergeant's horse and spurred off to another portion of the line. His guns played a large role in turning back the last attack of Gettysburg.

Henry Hunt continued as the indispensable chief of artillery for the rest of the war, but the last two years of the conflict offered few opportunities for the spectacular employment of his guns. Hunt got along well with Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, who put Hunt in charge of batteries involved in the Petersburg siege operations, which began in June 1864.

Hunt remained in the army and was stationed in the South during Reconstruction (where he gained a reputation for fairness). He retired in 1883 and became governor of the Soldiers' Home in Washington, D. C., where he died of pneumonia in 1889.

For further reading:

Longacre, Edward G. *Henry Hunt: The Man Behind the Guns.* South Brunswick, 1977.

——, "The Soul of Our Artillery," *Civil War Times Illustrated,* 12, June, 1973.